

# Town Meeting



BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

Broadcast by Stations of the American Broadcasting Co.



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## Are Divorces Ruining Our Children?

*Moderator, GEORGE V. DENNY, Jr.*

### *Speakers*

HENRY A. BOWMAN

VINCENT J. MALONE

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### COMING

May 30, 1950

**What Progress May We Expect in the Next Half Century?**

June 6, 1950

**Are We Fighting Communism Wisely?**

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# Town Meeting

BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

GEORGE V. DENNY, JR., MODERATOR



MAY 23, 1950

VOL. 16, No. 4

## Are Divorces Ruining Our Children?

### Announcer:

As we approach the 15th Anniversary of America's Town Meeting, we are particularly appreciative of the coöperation we receive week after week from the local ABC stations which bring you this program every Tuesday night.

Many of the station managers and their staffs provide extra services which increase the effectiveness of Town Meeting in their cities. For example, Station WCOP in Boston, where we'll originate next Tuesday, circulates Town Meeting subjects and speakers to schools and libraries in advance of each program. Station CFCF in Montreal, Canada, has a round-table discussion by McGill University students, relating each subject to Canadian interests.

So, our thanks go to all the 274 ABC stations, coast to coast, on the eve of our 15th Anniversary for the splendid coöperation they have rendered to keep Town Meeting the nation's most popular forum.

Now, to preside over our discussion, here is your Moderator, the President of Town Hall and Founder of America's Town Meeting of the Air, Mr. George V. Denny, Jr. Mr. Denny.  
(Applause)

### Moderator Denny:

Good evening, neighbors. Before we begin our discussion tonight, I want to thank each one of you who contributed to the support of our Round-the-World Town Meeting, and let you know that 23,287 of you contributed a total of \$66,328 to cover all of the direct expenses of the tour incurred by Town Hall. It was a most gratifying experience in every way and

U OF I  
LIBRARY

is paying dividends daily in increased understanding and good will throughout the world.

Tonight, we turn to a subject where understanding and good will are most important. On several previous occasions, we've discussed marriage and divorce from the point of view of the person that's concerned and of society. Tonight, our attention is concentrated on the child.

If you were the child of parents who were everlastingly quarreling, would you prefer to see them divorced or stay married? Whatever the reason, if your parents create an unhappy and ugly home life for you, what solution would you, as a child, prefer?

Looking back over your own childhood, what effect did the relationship between your parents have upon you? If your parents were divorced, was it a good or a bad solution to the problem?

"Are divorces ruining our children?" We've invited two experts to give us opposing views on this question. The first is a distinguished Catholic layman and attorney who has handled many cases in this field and has spoken forcefully on this subject. We welcome to Town Meeting Vincent J. Malone, attorney, and Vice President of the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Brooklyn. Mr. Malone. (*Applause*)

### **Mr. Malone:**

Divorce is only a phase of marriage. It follows then that preliminary to any intelligent discussion of divorce, its implications, and its effects on children in the family, one must of necessity have a basic understanding of the more fundamental notion of marriage.

What, then, is marriage? It must be obvious to all thinking persons, as Mr. George Sokolsky has pointed out, that marriage is not a contract of indefinite tenure, terminable at will and without regard to any social consequences. Marriage is not a private affair. It is not merely a legal right to cohabit. It involves more than personal convenience or consideration. Marriage is a contract freely entered into by a man and a woman by which they perpetually and exclusively transfer to each other the rights to acts suited for the generation of offspring.

The origin of marriage is in the natural law and is confirmed and sustained by religion. God is the author of the perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity, and its firmness.

Therefore, it is only reasonable to conclude that God made laws concerning it.

The nature of matrimony is entirely independent of the free will of man and is subject to divinely made laws. Hence, marriage cannot be subordinate to any human decrees or to any contrary pact, even of the spouses themselves.

The primary ends of marriage are the procreation and the education of children. It is for this reason that God has given to man and woman the power and the inclination to marry. It must ever be remembered that this end is not fulfilled by procreation alone. There is imposed upon the spouses the additional duty and obligation to raise, to nurture, and to educate the children of the union, having regard for their religious, temporal, and physical welfare—a task which, it must be conceded, is of lifelong duration.

Since the procreation of offspring implies and demands stability and unity, the contract of marriage is by its very nature one indissoluble, or perpetual during the lifetime of the spouses, and, too, exclusive — that is to say, the right it gives to each party cannot be given to another person at the same time. From this there flows the obligation of mutual fidelity.

Divorce, on the other hand, which is easily obtained—and unfortunately this is universally so—gives rise to a veritable train of evils, not the least of which are those which affect the child and the family. The child is deprived of his natural right to the continual company and example of both a father and a mother and, of equal importance, is denied a security customarily to be found in a firm and lasting marriage. As a rule, the child of a broken home, unable to give happily this divided allegiance, feels insecure and unloved. At best, he is maladjusted; at worst, a potential criminal or delinquent.

The family, the natural and fundamental group unit of society, becomes disintegrated, which is, or, at any rate, should be, the serious concern of the state, for history tellingly reminds us that the prosperity of the state and the temporal happiness of its citizens cannot remain safe where the foundation on which they are established—namely, wedlock and the family—becomes weakened.

In this connection, Dr. Kenneth D. Johnson, of the New York School of Social Work, recently admitted to the startling fact that at least 10 to 12 per cent of all children up to 18 years of age are victims of broken homes in this Nation, who, through absolutely no fault of their own, find themselves de-

prived of a normal home life. One of the alarming features of this observation, of course, is that it is from this group of children that billions of our future fathers and mothers will come. If there be occasions at a later date to complain about the water in the streams, said Dr. Johnson, be sure to look back to the source from which the stream flows.

Perhaps if the parents of these children had only contemplated the far-reaching implications of their decision to secure a divorce, they would have inescapably come to the realization that the same internal conflicts that caused the disruption of the first marriage persists in the second. It is a truism that one can divorce his mate but not his neurosis.

Contrary to the false impressions of many persons, there is no law which requires a husband and wife to live together when their union is intolerable. Divorce, the dissolution of a valid marriage, is not at all necessary for the separation. Our laws adequately protect the person who is legally separated for serious cause.

The answer to this vital problem is not easier laws, more divorces, but more respect for existing laws—a public educational program with emphasis on the spiritual values. The hedonism of our day and the repudiation of our Judeo-Christian tradition are the underlying causes for this deplorable existing evil. (*Applause*)

**Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Mr. Malone. Our next speaker feels quite differently about this question. He's Dr. Henry A. Bowman, head of the Division of Home and Family Life at Stephens College for Women in Columbia, Missouri, whose book, *Marriage for Moderns*, is widely known. Dr. Bowman's courses are among the most popular at this progressive institution which boasts a marriage rate of 90 per cent of its graduates and a very low divorce rate.

Well, Dr. Bowman, are divorces ruining our children, in your opinion? (*Applause*)

**Dr. Bowman:**

Mr. Malone and I approach our topic from somewhat different points of view. He thinks of marriage as independent of the will of man and subject only to divine law; its primary purpose as procreation, and its primary characteristic as indissolubility, and this primary characteristic must be preserved no matter who gets hurt.

I think of marriage as an institution designed to promote

human welfare, sanctioned by Jesus, but not made inflexible by Jesus. One of the primary emphases in Jesus' teaching was that human personality should never be subordinated to external form.

Another difference between Mr. Malone and myself is that he regrets divorce and also opposes it, while I regret it but do not oppose it. I regret divorce, not only because in itself it represents crisis, but also, and, perhaps, primarily, because divorce is a symptom of failure in marriage and family life.

I cannot deny that divorce does hurt many people, and especially children. It would be better, I am sure, if the modern family were more stable, but only if that stability represents not marital imprisonment but better adjustment.

We can divide families into those in which there has been divorce and those in which there has not been divorce, but that does not divide families into those which are happy and those which are unhappy. Neither does it divide families into those which help children to grow normally and those which warp children's personalities. What injures children is conflict, tension, insecurity, lack of love, and these may make their mark with or without divorce. And this mark is certainly made, Mr. Malone, in many cases of separation.

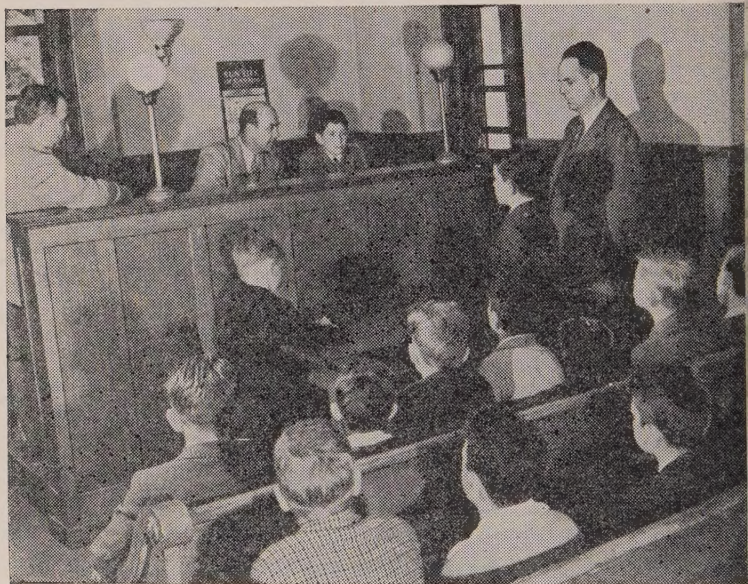
Divorce may add to a child's insecurity, but it is rarely the cause of that insecurity. It may lead him to be torn more than ever between his parents, but on the other hand, it may relieve him of a tug-of-war situation.

We are not safe in assuming that there is a healthy and healthful relationship between parents and children merely because they share the same dwelling. In extreme circumstances, children are even removed from their parents by act of law, because we recognize that the welfare of children sometimes demands such removal.

Anyone who gets insight into people's lives as I do, through counselling, knows that there are many children of divorced parents who are well adjusted, and many children of undivorced parents who are poorly adjusted or even delinquent. Sometimes there are both well adjusted and poorly adjusted children in the same family.

If we assume that divorces are ruining our children, then we should expect to find relatively fewer poorly adjusted persons in areas such as South Carolina, which permitted no divorce until recently, or in groups which, for religious reasons, don't permit divorce at all. Then where is the proof that such is the case?

If we assume that divorce has ruined children, we should have to make a corresponding assumption that the elimination of divorces would benefit children. This would not only be a false assumption, but would result in a misplaced emphasis. We should be blowing into the wrong end of the horn, so to speak; starting at the wrong end of the problem.



International News

***Many children brought to trial in our juvenile courts are the products of broken homes.***

By doing all we can to reduce the number of ill-advised divorces, to reconcile hasty couples, to improve and modernize divorce laws, the most constructive approach lies in preparing young people for marriage and family living through education and counselling and providing help to families that are having difficulties in their adjustment — the objective being to raise the general level of adjustment and not just to reduce divorce.

Certainly, I do not encourage divorce. I regret divorce but I also believe in divorce. I believe in divorce as I believe in surgery. I do not believe in surgeons who seize a knife the moment a patient enters an office. Neither do I believe in resorting to surgery if a less extreme method of treatment

might be more effective. But making surgery unlawful certainly would not save patients; making patients healthy will.

No, Mr. Malone, it is not the surgery of divorce that injures children. It is sick marriages. Our hope lies not in eliminating the means of escape from marriage, but in eliminating the need for it; and doing this by putting into every school in the United States, public and parochial, a program of preparation for marriage and family life. (*Applause*)

**Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Dr. Bowman. Now before we take the questions in the audience, perhaps you gentlemen would like to question each other. Let's start with Mr. Malone.

**Mr. Malone:** The central thesis of Dr. Bowman's argument seems to be that all the ills of the first marriage are cured by divorce, and they never appear in the second. Why wouldn't a separation be a perfectly adequate solution to a situation where the spouses have an intolerable relationship with one another?

**Dr. Bowman:** Thank you, Mr. Malone, I was just going to ask you a question about separation.

**Mr. Malone:** I see we can get together on this.

**Dr. Bowman:** I don't think a separation is the answer any more than a divorce is the answer, or any less so, for this reason:

Let us ask ourselves this question: "What is it that injures children?" Is it a theory about the relationship of a marriage to divine law? Is that what little children are injured by? Are little children injured by the legal technicalities of a divorce? Or are children injured by the relationships among the people upon whom they depend for security? I think you will agree with me that it's the last—it's the relationships among people (*applause*), and I do not see, Mr. Malone, how we can preserve those relationships any more in a separation or in an annulment than we can in a divorce. (*Applause*)

**Mr. Denny:** Do you want to comment on that?

**Mr. Malone:** I should like to make one observation. I'm convinced of the fact that children are always injured when their parents violate the divine and natural law. (*Applause*)

**Mr. Denny:** All right. Thank you. Now, while we get ready for our question period, here is a message for our Town Meeting listeners.

**Announcer:** Do you remember the Town Meeting about two years ago with John Mason Brown and Al Capp on "What's

Wrong With the Comics?" Somebody reminds us of it in every city we visit. And do you happen to recall the tense drama of the most exciting Town Meeting debate on record between Dean Acheson and Verne Marshall in 1941, and the Ickes-Gannett debate on the free press? And did you hear Wendell Willkie's first address over a national network in his debate with Robert Jackson on government and business?

These and other memorable Town Meetings will live again next Monday night, May 29, when the American Broadcasting Company presents a special documentary program reviewing the most distinguished Town Meetings of our 15 years on the air. Mr. Denny, himself, will be the narrator for this whole hour program, which has been built by ABC for your enjoyment. Be sure to listen next Monday night, May 29, to the Town Meeting documentary, as well as next Tuesday, to the special full-hour anniversary program.

Now for our question period, we return you to Mr. Denny.

# QUESTIONS, PLEASE!

*Mr. Denny:* We'll start with the young man here on the aisle.

*Man:* I should like to ask Mr. Malone, aren't divorces allowing our children a new start in life—that is, enablement to get away from the unhappy home life which necessarily preceded the divorce?

*Mr. Malone:* My answer to that, sir, is this—that divorce never solves conflicts. If people can't live together, they may perfectly well live separate and apart. But the implication of a divorce is a new marriage; and that, I respectfully submit, is not good.

*Mr. Denny:* All right, thank you. Now, the young lady on the other side.

*Lady:* I would like to ask Dr. Bowman a question. After the divorce, is it serious for the child to have his time divided between his parents?

*Dr. Bowman:* I think we shall have to admit that in some cases it is difficult for the child to have his time divided. On the other hand, I think that sometimes a division of his time relieves the child from conflict that would be present if the parents were always with him. (*Applause*)

*Man:* I have a question for Mr. Malone. Do you think that children are any more ruined by divorced parents than they are by unhappily married parents?

*Mr. Malone:* I do so. I do, without any question, think that there is an evil in divorce that does not persist or obtain where the parties are simply separated. They at least, in separation, have one set of parents, not two, with all the difficulties and complexities that arise from that situation. (*Applause*)

*Lady:* Dr. Bowman, does an open-court fight over the custody of the child in the presence of the child create disaster in a child otherwise capable of adjusting to a divorce?

*Dr. Bowman:* Yes, I think that might well be true—that a child dragged into a court scene and shown the open conflict between his parents and his parents and society may be permanently injured by that experience.

*Lady:* Mr. Malone, what difference is there between children of divorce and those of marriages annulled because of religious restrictions?

*Mr. Malone:* Well, the basis of an annulment predicated on a religious basis is that there is never any validity to the first

marriage; and we're assuming here, of course, a valid marriage, which should not, therefore, be dissolved or annulled.

*Man:* Dr. Bowman, should divorces be granted only by a properly constituted board consisting of a psychiatrist or psychologist, a domestic relations judge, and a spiritual adviser? When those three have approved, only then should divorces be granted. What do you think of that?

*Dr. Bowman:* I think if we could have our ideal social and legal setup, then we should have something such as this gentleman suggests. Short of that, we could do more than we do at present in the same direction that you mean your committee to work.

*Lady:* Mr. Malone, is it important to the child that he continue to see both parents after his parents are divorced?

*Mr. Malone:* Absolutely. The child has a right to the continual company of a father and mother and to their examples as I have attempted to point out in the few remarks I made.

*Man:* Dr. Bowman, when the parents are divorced, will the foster parent have the same devotion to the child?

*Dr. Bowman:* I know personally of cases that have come into my experience where the foster parent has a greater devotion to the child than the own parent had. I have talked with children—rather, grown-up children—who have said that they wished their parents could be divorced so that they could all be happier. And I've talked with those children later after the parents have remarried and found the children happy in the new marriage.

## THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

**VINCENT J. MALONE**—Mr. Malone is a member of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York and is vice president of the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Brooklyn. A practicing attorney in New York City, he specializes in cases involving marriage problems.

**HENRY A. BOWMAN**—Dr. Bowman is chairman of the Division of Home and Family Living at Stephens College, Columbia, Mo., where he has been a professor of sociology since 1931. He received his B.A. degree from Western Reserve University and his doctorate from Yale University.

Dr. Bowman is a member of the advisory council of the National Council on Family Relations and a consultant for the American Institute for Family Relations. A frequent contributor to college journals and magazines, he is the author of *Marriage for Moderns*, a college textbook in marriage education.

*Man:* Mr. Malone, why would legal separation be less in-  
rurious to a child than divorce? (*Applause*)

*Mr. Malone:* Well, the implications, of course, are that the  
child continues to have one father and one mother, with the  
separation, and not stepparents, which beget complications  
times.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. Did you want to make a comment?  
All right, the young man right here. Yes? For our Dr. Bow-  
man.

*Man:* Dr. Bowman, do lax divorce requirements encourage  
sky marriages, with unhappy children? Were such lax re-  
quirements sanctioned by Jesus, to quote your phrase?

*Dr. Bowman:* I don't believe that most people go into  
marriage with the idea of getting divorced. It seems to me  
that there are other factors causing poor choice and hasty  
marriage than an anticipation of easy divorce.

Now, you asked me about Jesus. I do not think that Jesus  
suggested easy divorce. But I do think, as Jesus states in  
chapter 19 of Matthew, that he did permit divorce in those  
cases in which the marriage was already breaking down  
through adultery. (*Applause*)

*Mr. Malone:* May I comment on that, sir?

*Mr. Denny:* Yes, sir.

*Mr. Malone:* I most substantially disagree with that state-  
ment. When our Lord made his remarks he said, "What God  
th joined together, let no man put asunder," and he never  
justified divorce on any principle—adultery notwithstanding.  
(*Applause*)

*Mr. Denny:* Now we're going to have a debate on the Bible.  
Bowman?

*Dr. Bowman:* I'm quoting now from the Gospel of St.  
Matthew. Jesus is speaking: "Whosoever shall put away his  
wife, save for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit  
adultery." What can that be interpreted to mean except that  
Jesus said there was a loophole? (*Applause*)

*Mr. Malone:* I'm afraid that the good doctor's translation  
somewhat awry there. I don't believe that's the translation  
at all. (*Laughter and applause*)

*Mr. Denny:* I believe there are two different interpreta-  
tions of the Bible; one used by the Catholic Church, and the  
other, the Saint James Version of the Bible. Is that correct?  
Yours is the Saint James Version? And what is yours, Mr.  
Malone?

*Mr. Malone:* The Douay Version.

Mr. Denny: There you have it. All right. The gentleman in the center aisle. Yes?

Man: Mr. Malone. Divorce today in many instances is result of a lack of full realization on the part of couples that marriage is a lifetime contract. Is your society doing anything to remedy this?

Mr. Malone: Not enough, I am sorry to say. I think that we need a complete revision of thought on the subject of divorce and its implications and that we should have the kind of educational program that I adverted to before.

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Now, the young lady way over on the other side.

Lady: Dr. Bowman. Do you think that, before divorcing, parents should explain to the child the reason for divorce without leaving out any of the reasons?

Mr. Denny: They should be very honest about it, you mean?

Dr. Bowman: I don't think we can answer that question "Yes" or "No." It would depend on the age and understanding of the child. I should hesitate to try to explain to a three-year old, for example, some of the reasons for divorce.

Mr. Denny: All right, thank you, Dr. Bowman.

We've had some very interesting questions here tonight and I hope we've suggested some solutions. Thank you, Dr. Bowman and Mr. Malone. Now, in just a moment, I'll tell you about our subjects and speakers for next week.

Announcer: Here at last, between the covers of one beautifully illustrated book, are the answers to all your questions about Town Meeting. This fascinating story, entitled *Good Evening, Neighbors*, is being published this week to commemorate Town Meeting's 15th Anniversary.

The book's 80 pages constitute the whole dramatic and significant record of these programs since their inception 15 years ago next Tuesday night, together with action shots of outstanding programs, or memorable quotations from the various speakers, and feature articles by Harry A. Overstreet, Norman Cousins, Dr. George Stoddard, Walter Reuther, Herman Steinkraus, Wendell Willkie, and, yes, a cartoon by A. Capp, entitled, "Li'l Abner Goes to Town Meeting!" A whole section of the book is devoted to a pictorial report of last summer's Round-the-World Town Meeting and World Town Hall Seminar. For your copy of *Good Evening, Neighbors*, just send \$1 to Town Hall, New York 18, New York.

Now, to tell you about next week's program, here is Mr. Denny.

Mr. Denny: Next week is really Town Meeting Week, at least for the first two days.

On Monday night at 8:30, Eastern Daylight Saving Time, ABC is presenting an hour-long documentary called, "America's Town Meeting—1935 to 1950," which will bring you the dramatic and significant highlights of Town Meeting's best



# Town Meeting Bulletin

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programs over the past 15 years. Consult your local paper for the exact time.

The next night, Memorial Day, May 30, is our 15th anniversary, and we'll take a long look at the future in our discussion of the subject, "What Progress May We Expect in the Next Half Century?" Dr. James R. Killian, Jr., President of one of the greatest scientific institutions—Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Dr. Earnest A. Hooton, leading American anthropologist of Harvard University; Dr. Fairfield Osborn, President of the New York Zoological Society and author of *Our Plundered Planet*; and your Moderator will be the speakers. Our Guest Moderator will be Mr. Erwin Canham, Editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

We'll be the guests on this occasion of the General Federation of Women's Clubs at their 60th Annual Meeting, and this program, too, will last for a full hour, starting at 8:30, Eastern Daylight Saving Time.

So remember the change of time and two special full-hour programs about Town Meeting—at 8:30 Eastern Daylight Saving Time — next Monday and next Tuesday nights. If you're in some other time zone, consult your local paper and listen for the sound of the Crier's bell.